When Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006b), was featured on the British television show, *Richard and Judy*, in 2007, co-host Richard Madeley offered the following enthusiastic, but not altogether inspired thought about the book: ‘It’s a sort of Nigerian version of *Gone with the Wind*.’ The presenter’s observation was the first in a series of comments visibly meant to underline the ‘universal’ appeal of the African author’s novel about the Biafran War: ‘Within three pages’, Madeley continued, ‘I felt as if I was reading about something that happened here in Britain – the parallels between all of our lives are just so identical’ (*Richard and Judy*, 2007). After several references to major world conflicts (all supposedly reminiscent of the civil war between Nigeria and Biafra at the heart of *Half of a Yellow Sun*), the comparison with *Gone with the Wind* was reiterated thrice more in the course of the 13-minute televised sequence. The analogy, rather infelicitous in view of its contrived universalist underpinnings and its unwitting branding of Adichie’s novel as a melodrama, even verged on the comical for those recalling the dubious racial politics of Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 novel and its 1939 film adaptation. As is commonly known, the sweeping tale of Scarlett O’Hara, whether on the page or on the screen, has often been accused of endorsing the institution of slavery in the Deep South at the time of the American Civil War.

In spite of this, *Gone with the Wind* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* can be said to share one noteworthy feature: both works weave together an absorbing story with an unmistakably political subtext. Yet in Adichie’s case, even this seemingly straightforward remark must be
approached with circumspection, as the author has repeatedly discouraged narrowly political readings of her books: ‘Sometimes I get very upset when people talk about my work’ and its “‘political importance’,” she comments. ‘It’s really about love’ (Adichie and Wainaina, 2011). Needless to say, Adichie’s provocative statement should not be taken entirely at face value, but it can easily be viewed as an attempt to resist interpretative pigeonholing of the kind practised by those who read African fiction through an exclusively political lens, often at the expense of the literature’s more broadly humanistic or emotional appeal. To an extent, this analytical trend bears resemblance to the ‘anthropological fallacy’ discussed in Chapter 1, in the sense that both practices tend to overlook the artistic essence of literary works to consider them as social treatises of sorts. However, it would be just as absurd to regard as apolitical a novel whose title refers to the rising sun depicted on the Biafran flag (itself a political symbol) as it would be to read the book as a pro-Igbo or anti-colonial pamphlet. Upon closer inspection, then, the main issue potentially plaguing any political reading of Adichie’s work is not related to the legitimacy of such an attempt, but to its methodology. Appraising the ideological purport of the Nigerian writer’s production is an entirely valid undertaking, inasmuch as the examination takes into consideration the ways in which the aesthetic actually shapes the political. As will be shown in this chapter, the use of distinctive stylistic techniques in Half of a Yellow Sun encourages readers to privilege certain interpretations over others; these retrieved meanings, I will argue, aggregate to elicit allegiances with specific points of view, and guide sympathies towards, or away from, particular characters.

This affective potential of the novelistic text is what Adichie herself has recognized as being the distinguishing feature of realist literature. Because, she says, ‘we are emotional beings’ (2012: 5), ‘a book of reportage, an accumulation of facts’ (p. 8) will not leave the same mark on its readers as a well-crafted literary work: ‘Logic can convince’, she states, ‘but it is in fact emotion that leads us to act’ (p. 5). The recognition that fiction is more than a simple lining-up of facts carries with it the important implication that the literary writer, in devising his or her fictional tale, consciously relinquishes any attempt at ‘objectivity’ that might, for instance, constitute a journalist’s ideal. Instead, ‘[r]ealistic fiction’, Adichie explains, ‘seeks to infuse the real with meaning’; it is ‘the process of turning fact into truth’ (p. 3).